



## ***FOCUS ON THE FAMILY POSITION STATEMENT:***

### ***HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS VACCINES***

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The human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the United States, currently infecting approximately 20 million Americans with more than 6 million new cases each year. HPV is the leading cause of cervical cancer. It is also associated with oral cancer, cancers of the vagina, vulva, penis, anus, head and neck, and genital warts.

The seriousness of HPV and other STIs underscores the significance of God's design for sexuality to human wellbeing. Thus, Focus on the Family affirms – above any available health intervention – abstinence until marriage and faithfulness after marriage as the best and primary practice in preventing HPV and other STIs.

This said, two pharmaceutical manufacturers – GlaxoSmithKline and Merck – have developed HPV vaccines. GlaxoSmithKline's product (Cervarix) targets two types of the virus and is intended for women only. Merck's product (Gardasil) provides immunity for four types of HPV and is intended for use in both males and females. Approval from U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and a formal recommendation from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are necessary for these vaccines to be available to the public. To date, this approval has only been granted for a limited use of Gardasil in females ages 9 through 26. Expansion of HPV vaccine approvals is expected in the future.

Recognizing the worldwide detriment to individuals and families resulting from HPV, Focus on the Family supports and encourages the development of safe, effective and ethical vaccines against HPV, as well as other viruses. The use of these vaccines may prevent many cases of cervical cancer, thus saving the lives of millions of women across the globe.

Therefore, Focus on the Family **supports** widespread (universal) availability of HPV vaccines but **opposes** mandatory HPV vaccinations for entry to public school. The decision of whether to vaccinate a minor against this or other sexually transmitted infections should remain with the child's parent or guardian. As in all areas of sexual health and education, Focus on the Family upholds parents' right to be the primary decision maker and educator for their children. The use of these vaccines should involve informed consent for parents as well as education for both parents and youth regarding the potential benefits and risks of the vaccine. In making this decision, parents should consider the following:

- No vaccine is 100% effective against disease;
- There are more than one hundred types of HPV and the existing vaccines are effective against, at most, four of these;
- The types of the virus that these vaccines protect against are the cause of most but not all cases of cervical cancer;
- The possibility of HPV infection resulting from sexual assault, including date rape;
- The possibility that young persons may marry someone previously exposed to and still carrying the virus;
- The HPV vaccines do not protect against other STIs or prevent pregnancy;
- The HPV vaccines do not, in any circumstance, negate or substitute the best health message of sexual abstinence until marriage and sexual faithfulness after marriage.

Focus on the Family does not endorse a particular HPV vaccine product or manufacturer.

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